

## INTRODUCTION TO PARTS FIVE AND SIX

### **The search continues and the description of the remains uncovered in eight archaeological zones**

Inspired by the discovery of the first few metres of paved road on mount Bastione, we continued our search convinced we would find other remains towards the Futa pass, aware of the need to reach this objective, which Alfieri himself considered fundamental.

This was in spite of the fact that we were substantially disappointed by the coldness of the academic world, which showed utter indifference to these first finds and did nothing to exploit the opportunity to open an archaeological research site on a university level so close to Bologna. It would have been a perfect training ground for young archaeology assistants and students and we could have offered our services as guides. The area was difficult to explore and we were convinced that with mutual collaboration we could have achieved some interesting results.

However, on one hand, the negative attitude of the scientific world was beneficial because it fired our competitive spirit and increased our enthusiasm for our "solo" efforts to continue the exploration. From that moment on, we dedicated more time to our explorations from March to November. It was no longer a matter of carrying out searches as if they were a holiday pastime, but it was a matter of bringing to an end a task that had become a moral obligation.

To give more scientific consistency to our search, we realised that we not only needed to dedicate attention to identifying the road route but

also to every clue and outcrop that could help us reconstruct the history of the area.

The ancient mule track along the crest of the ridge was our constant guide and reference (it is still visible along most of its route). At times, it was difficult to identify because hidden by vegetation, or because we were led astray by anomalous deviations created to avoid unexpected obstacles. Whatever the case, we always managed to find the itinerary by returning to the crest. We paid particular attention to the name of each place we went through, checking to ascertain their origin. This applies to mount Luario, Piana degli Ossi and Poggio Castelluccio.

As we intercepted each small stretch of paving, we carried out the narrowest excavation possible to discover the edges of the road and to check the width to ensure it was the same structure and continuation of the road system uncovered previously. It was only later, with the manual help of willing friends that we returned to these sites to further our excavation and get a broader and more complete view of each find. Therefore, the remains that we would like to illustrate to you now are the result of our explorations, test digs and the collaboration of numerous friends who offered us important manual aid and moral support.

When in the autumn of 1986, the Archaeological Superintendency for Tuscany (competent for the area), was officially informed of our finds<sup>1</sup>, it attentively started

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<sup>1</sup> By letter dated 29/09/86 (document 1). We sent the Archaeological Superintendency of Tuscany an initial report of our finds. We received a very prompt reply informing us of an imminent inspection by one of their officials (document 2), subsequently arranged for 16/11/1986.

to check the progress of our research and subsequently excavated in the areas we indicated.

Only the remains of the bridge in Colombaiotto (in Bilancino – archaeological zone “H”) and the Roman brick kiln in Sassorosso can be attributed to a concomitance of lucky circumstances. These finds lie exactly along the route of the road, one on the river Sieve and the other near mount Venere. They are important archaeological testimonies, which confirm the existence of the Roman transapennine route for a further 21 kilometres, increasing the continuity of the remains to a total 37 kilometres.

The remains of the Roman road are substantially located in the heart of the Apennine range, in eight archaeological zones, which we shall describe in the following pages, indicating their exact position on I.G.M. [Italian Military Geographic Institution] maps and illustrating them with plans, sketches and photographs.

Starting from zone “A” (mount Bastione), the site of our first positive excavations, we proceed in compliance with the chronology of our finds as far as zone “H” (the bridge in Colombaiotto).

The finds between mount Bastione and the Futa pass (PART FIVE 1979 - 1992) are grouped into four archaeological zones (A, B, C, D,) located on the highest point of the transapennine itinerary, reaching altitudes of 1120 metres on mount Bastione, 1166 metres on mount Poggiaccio and 1110 metres on Poggio Castelluccio<sup>2</sup>. The actual Apennine pass used by the Roman route is, therefore, on mount Poggiaccio and not on the Futa pass, which only reaches an altitude of 903 metres above sea level<sup>3</sup>.

We mainly passed the first ten years of our explorations searching along this band of territory. Although it is just 8.5 km long, we were kept very busy with numerous test excavations. In many cases, our efforts were rewarded by the discovery of well-preserved stretches of paving as well as other interesting archaeological remains, which confirmed



Plate 13  
Route of the Roman road from Bologna to Fiesole.

- Evidence of this route is provided by the continuity of the archaeological finds.
- - - Probable continuation of the route northwards to Bologna and southwards to Fiesole.
- Archaeological sites: sites A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H.

<sup>2</sup> These altitudes refer to the Roman road, which passes just below these peaks, following the level of the ridge; thus avoiding unnecessary ascents and descents over a few tens of metres. Their peaks reach respectively 1190 m, 1196 m and 1131 m above sea level.

<sup>3</sup> The Futa pass is now the pass used by trunk road 65 (called the Futa road) because this is where the modern road starts its constant descent towards Mugello.



the persistence along this ridge of an important pre-Roman, Roman and Medieval road system.

From 1979 to 1983, we continued our search alone. We were then joined by Vittorio Di Cesare, a freelance journalist and topographer, who was one of the first to realise the importance of our task and who often came with us to carry out topographical surveys of the previously uncovered paving. When in 1985, we were featured in the monthly magazine of the Soc. Autostrade in Rome, he wrote six articles to illustrate the finds made up to that point <sup>4</sup>, thus publicly revealing the results of our

research for the very first time.

This news did not escape the attention of Nereo Liverani, journalist for "La Nazione" (a daily newspaper in Florence), who on 5 November 1985, published an article about the topic<sup>5</sup>. It was the first article in a daily newspaper with a wide readership that contributed (as well as the spread of the discovery through personal contacts and conferences), towards arousing progressive and obliging interest in our initiative, and a certain degree of criticism.

In PART SIX we describe the finds discovered between mount Bastione and mount Venere (1985-1992): the *glarea* road (archaeological zone "E") and the Roman brick kiln in

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<sup>4</sup> These articles appeared in the magazine entitled "Autostrade", a monthly technical and informative publication issued by Soc. Autostrade in Rome. The first three articles were published in issues 7-8-9 and issue 12 in 1985, and the others in issues 7-8-9 and issue 11 in 1986.

<sup>5</sup> See document 3.

Sassorosso (Archaeological zone “F”).



## PART FIVE

# THE EXPLORATIONS AND FINDS FROM MOUNT BASTIONE TO THE FUTA PASS (1979-1992)

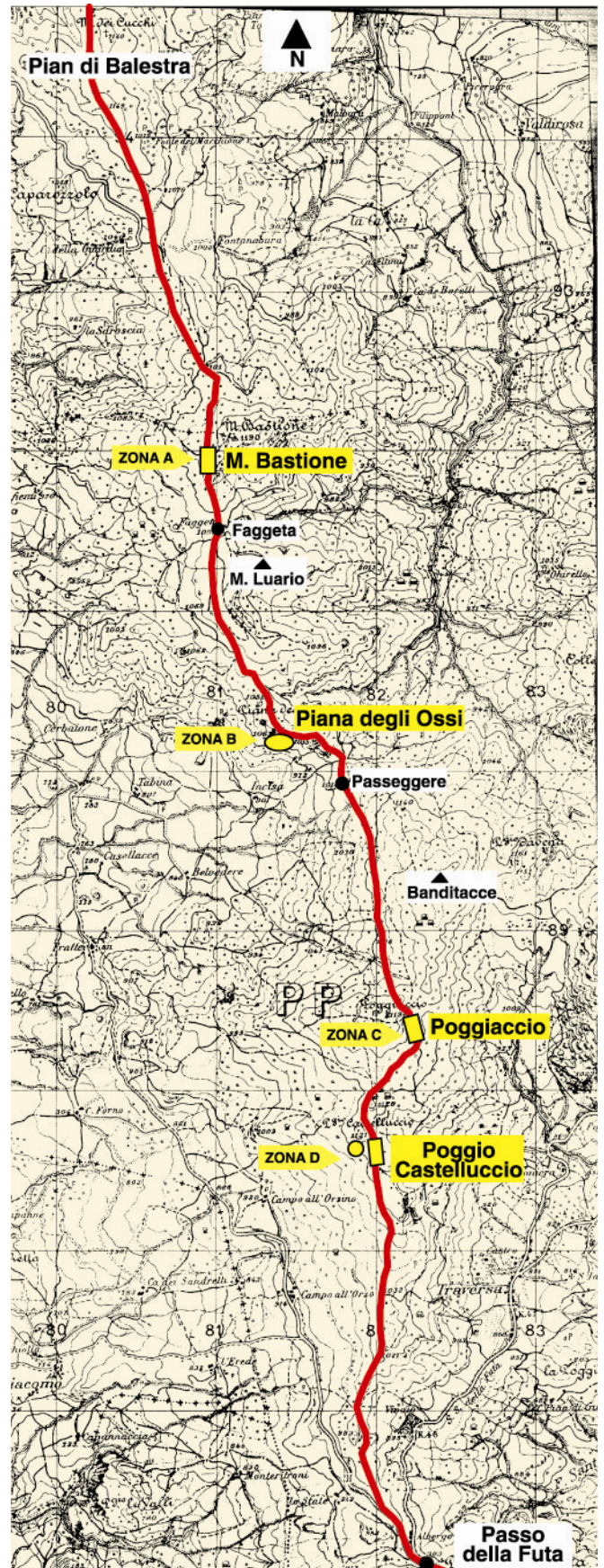


Plate 14

The Roman route and the archaeological sites from mount Bastione to the Futa pass – archaeological sites A, B, C, and D.

(Italian Military Geographic Institution (I.G.M.) authorisation No. 5034 dated 13.07.99)



## CHAPTER IX

### MOUNT BASTIONE (ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE “A”: sites A/1 - A/2 - A/3 and A/4) AND THE BEECH WOOD:

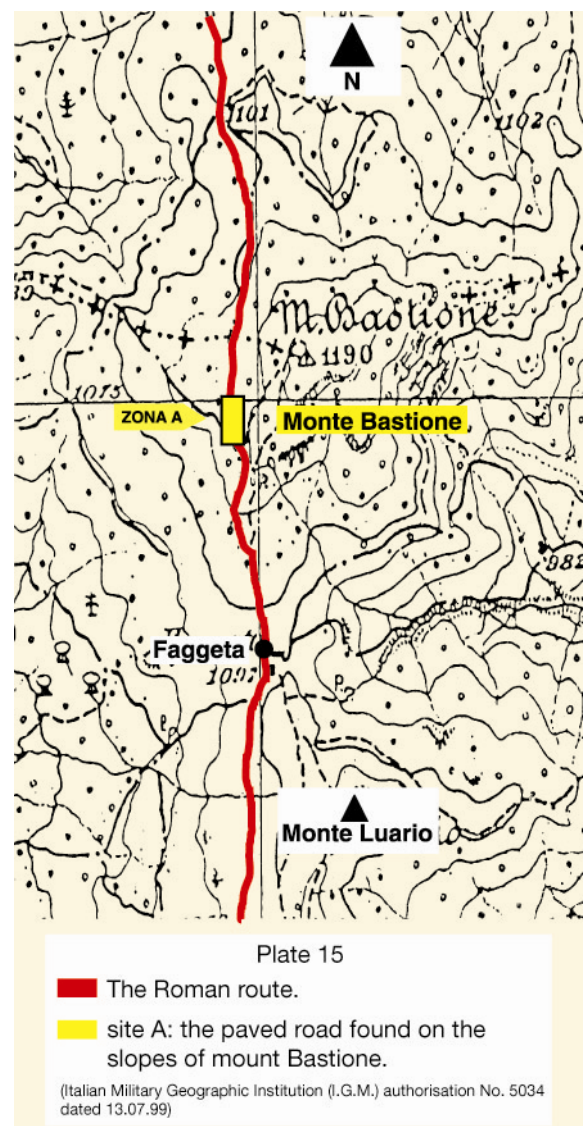
- 1 - The Roman paving stones (sites A/1 - A/2 - A/3 and A/4).
- 2 - The pre-Roman path (sites A/5 and A/6).
- 3 - In three thousand years, seven parallel road routes have been built on the western versant of the same ridge.
- 4 - The beech wood.

#### 1 - The Roman paving stones (sites A/1 - A/2 - A/3 and A/4)

Mount Bastione is between the Savena and Setta valleys, where the border divides Emilia from Tuscany<sup>1</sup>. Its peak (1190 metres above sea level) competes with the peaks of mount Poggiaccio, Sasso di Castro and mount Freddi. It does not have any rivals on the north side, therefore on a clear day, it is possible to see with the naked eye the Basilica of S. Luca on Colle della Guardia and beyond the low grey line of the Po Valley, the snow-capped peaks of the Alps emerge like enormous sails.

Its name leaves no doubt as to its past function as a “castellar” and fortress. The peak is shaped like an oval platform measuring some 250 square metres and it is defended by two deep circular trenches<sup>2</sup>. It was probably used in the past by various rivals, from the Byzantines to the militias of the Grand Duchy. Its “castellar” origin is beyond doubt: the fragments of ceramics found here can be attributed to Apennine-Ligurian civilisations (8<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) and are identical to the ones also found later on mount Poggiaccio and Poggio Castelluccio.

The finds in archaeological zone “A” are about 70 metres below the peak, where the south ridge reaches the level of the north ridge. Here we uncovered about



<sup>1</sup> The boundary line is marked by a number of cylindrical sandstone boundary stones with the date 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Serafino Calindri: work cited, page 236. He mentions that on the peak of Mount Bastione “... there are the remains of an earth fort, with its parade ground, trench and counter trench, bastion, etc. built during the last wars between Florence and the Pope in the past century, not quite on the border between the two states”.





Mount Bastione: *photograph taken from the north. The road was uncovered on the west slope, 70 metres below the peak. Pian di Balestra is in the foreground.*

80 metres of 2.50 metre wide paved road, just a few metres from the ridge and whose state of preservation varies according to its position.

#### SITE A/1

In site “A/1”, which was where we made our first find, the paving is more or less intact for about ten metres. Therefore, it has been possible to verify the construction technique employed to build it.

Locally quarried sandstone blocks are aligned along the uphill side of the road. On average, they are 40/50 cm wide and 25/30 cm deep. The stones are positioned over a bed of fine sandstone gravel (*glarium*), which appears to be waste material from the quarries and has the dual function of providing the paving with stability and improving rainwater drainage. Every now and again, these stones are alternated by narrower stones (always 25/30 cm deep). Narrower and deeper set stones were used to construct the downhill edge, so that they offered more support to the central part of the road. Smaller stones were used to build the centre of the road. Each stone fits perfectly with the stones next to it

and the paving is compact and solid. The downhill edge of the other nine metres of road uncovered on site A/1 is very uneven and has even disappeared in some points, whereas the uphill edge preserves its original compactness.

The 60 cm thick layer of humus covering the paving on the uphill side of the carriageway surprised us. One must bear in mind that here the road is only 8/10 metres below the summit of the ridge. It is obvious that in this location near the summit, the soil and debris normally carried by rainwater is unable to deposit due to the simple fact that uphill of the paving, there is no sloping ground to encourage this micro-matter to slip downwards; therefore, the carriageway cannot have been covered by this matter after just a few centuries. Nor can the depth of the humus be attributed to small surface landslides because the road is located on the summit of the ridge. The 60 cm layer of matter covering the uphill edge is, therefore, very significant because it is the fruit of very gradual sedimentation mainly due





Mount Bastione (site A/1-north): *the best-preserved stretch of road found on mount Bastione.*





Mount Bastione (site A/1-north): *a close-up of the paving.*



Mount Bastione (site A/1): *detail of the uphill edge of the paving; the neatly fitted wide sandstones slabs and the layer of 60 cm of soil that covered them can be seen clearly. It is important to note the closeness of the ridge summit (8-10 m) which can be seen in the background.*





Mount Bastione (site A/1-north): *detail of the uphill edge of the paving; some stones are as much as 60 cm wide.*



Mount Bastione (site A/1) - 16 November 1986): *Luca Fedeli, Inspector from the Archaeological Superintendency of Tuscany (centre) on his first visit to see the paving already partially covered by the autumn leaves. He is accompanied by Cesare Agostini (left) and Franco Santi.*

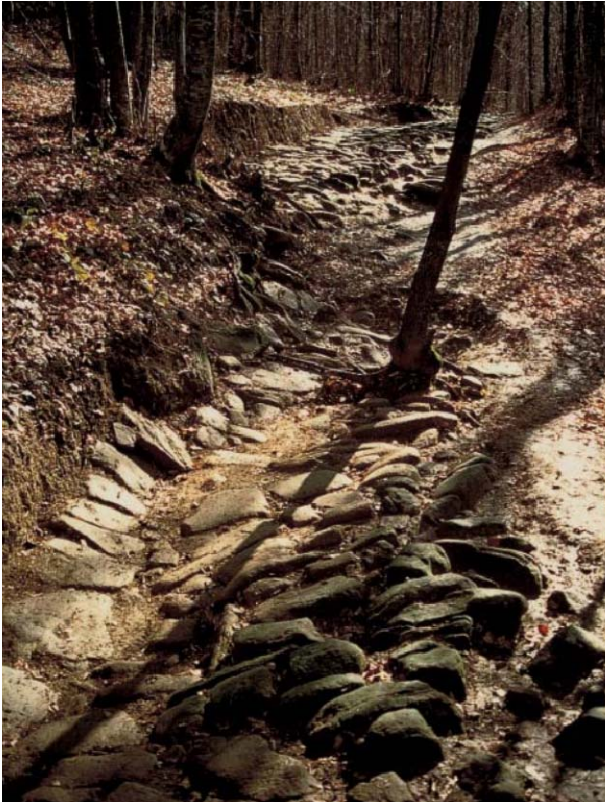


Mount Bastione (site A/1-north): *the entire 19 metres of road brought to light. The part in the foreground is well preserved whereas the downhill edge of other part is uneven due to slight soil subsidence. In the background, it is possible to see the completely irregular continuation of the paving towards the left caused by a surface landslide.*

to the falling of leaves and branches, and to a lesser extent to fine dust and small pieces of debris carried by the wind, thus the thickness of the sedimentation can easily be attributed to the passing of two thousand years<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> To give an idea of the slow increase in organic sedimentary layers, fruit of the minute maceration of leaves and branches, it is worth pointing out that in the area near mount Poggiaccio, where we found trenches dug by American soldiers in the autumn of 1944, in the area around the trenches we found tin lids, cutlery, tin foil coffee and sugar bags, etc. which were lying under a layer of humus measuring just 2-3 cm, and that was after over 50 years had passed by!





#### SITES A/2 AND A/3

In the adjacent sites (A/2 and A/3) located further north, the entire width of the paving is very deformed for a length of 52 metres (to such an extent that it rises and sinks). This is obviously the effect of a landslide that dragged the entire road downhill, completely misaligning this stretch from the stretch immediately before it<sup>4</sup>.

#### SITE A/4

About 10 metres of site A/4, has also been affected by soil subsidence, although this has had less effect on the layout of the paving, which is still compact. Here, the uphill and downhill edges have been built using very large sandstone slabs. This detail indicates that when the road was built, the ground was almost even (as it still is today).



Mount Bastione (site A/2-south): *the paving deformed by a surface landslide.*

<sup>4</sup> This stretch of paving was unearthed with the vital help of Bruno Ciccone, who we would like to thank for his generous efforts over many years.





Mount Bastione (site A/3): the only stretch of road not deformed by the landslide on site A/3. Large slabs of sandstone re-emerge from the wood defining either edge of the road. The measuring stick lying on the paving gives a visual idea of the width of the paving stones and the carriageway.



Mount Bastione (site A/4): the edge (curbstones) uncovered 80 m north of the first find. Note how the construction technique matches the curbstone pictured in the photograph on the right (a stretch of the consular Via Salaria).

## 2 - The pre-Roman path (sites A/5 and A/6).

While exploring this part of the ridge, during an excavation carried out exactly on the summit, we came across sandstone paving just 1.25 metres wide, made using a much rougher technique. We then continued to dig along the summit of the ridge; just a few metres further south, the ridge turns right and starts to descend decisively for a few tens of metres. The paving follows the ridge exactly and therefore it too curves to the right and descends, always maintaining a constant width of 1.25 metres. We only uncovered two stretches measuring a total 25 metres because the downhill paving had very clearly been uprooted and disarranged. In the opposite direction (north), our test digs to discover where this paving continued, did not provide any concrete results



Left curb of the ancient Via Salaria after kilometre 53 (from “*Strade romane, percorsi e infrastrutture*” [Roman roads, routes and infrastructures] by Lorenzo Quilici from Bologna University. Extract: *la via Salaria da Roma all’alto Velino* [The Via Salaria from Rome to the Upper Velino] Published by L’ “Erma” in Bretschneider, page 103).

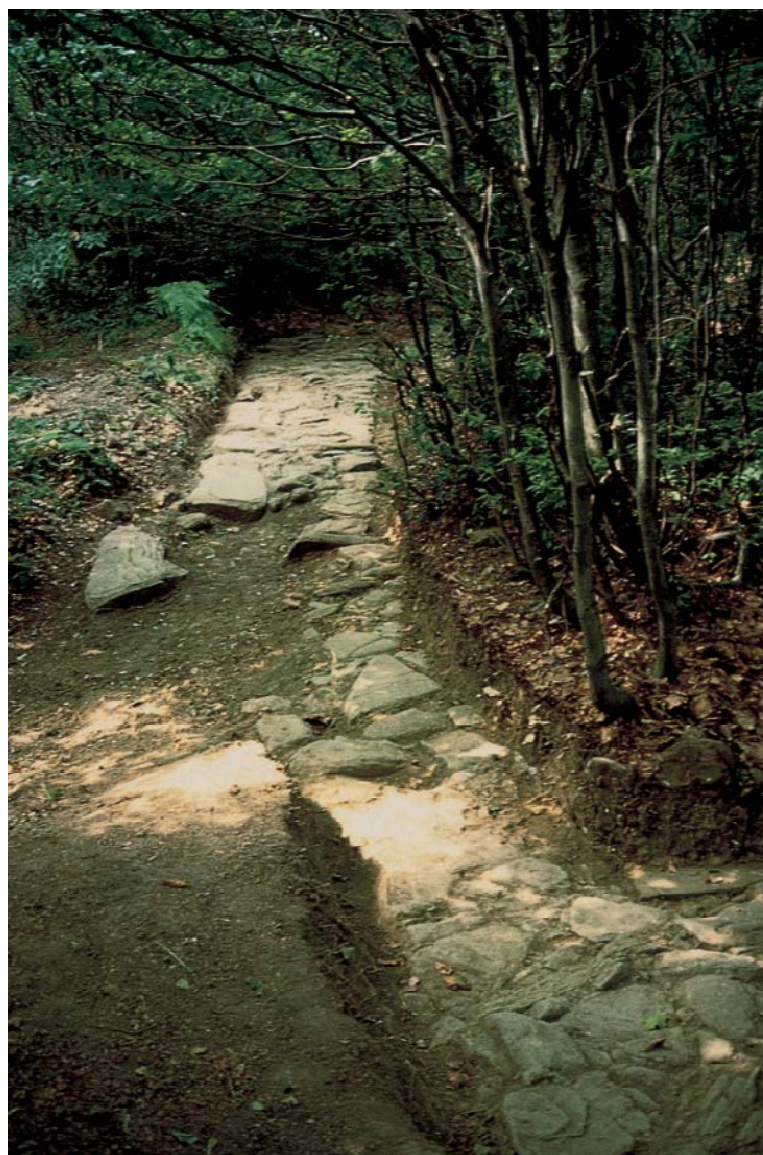




Mount Bastione (site A/4-south): *along this stretch, the downhill edge of the paving (right) was also made with large sandstone blocks laid horizontally.*

These two stretches of paved pathway (identified by us as sites “A/5” and “A/6”), are about 80/90 metres further south than site A/1 and follow the exact summit of the ridge, whereas the Roman paving passes 10 metres below. If you trace the ideal continuation of the Roman road southwards in a straight line, you will notice that it<sup>5</sup> descends gently along the side of the ridge, getting progressively further away from the summit (almost flat here), and then rejoins the continuation of the ridge, where it slopes down steeply. By doing this, the road avoided the turn and the steep slope that the paved path rigidly follows along the summit of the ridge. In other words, it is obvious that the Roman road “shortcuts” the curve, thus avoiding the steep slope

Bearing in mind the location of the site and the position of the remains, this implies that the paved path was built before the Roman road: any other construction chronology does not make sense. In fact, if a straight 2.50 m road already existed, there was no point in constructing a path barely 1.25 m wide, which had to



Mount Bastione (site A/5-north): *The 1.25 m wide paved path found on the summit of the ridge not far from the Roman road. The disappearance of part of this path can be attributed to the centuries-old transit of charcoal burners and woodcutters, testified by a track that intersects it.*

<sup>5</sup> In spite of assiduous explorations, we were unable to find the southward continuation of the Roman road near site A/1 due to the numerous landslides that have taken place over the centuries.



climb up a steep slope, turn a corner and take a longer route to connect the same two points of the ridge. Perhaps the fact that the paved pathway on the ridge fell into disuse is the reason why it has survived until today. If these observations are correct, it is possible to conclude that these are the remains of paving constructed along the transapennine route of the Etruscan pathway, in a point where it was necessary to consolidate muddy ground up a steep slope and around a bend.

### **3 - In three thousand years, seven parallel routes have been built on the west versant of the same ridge.**

Archaeological zone “A” takes on even more importance when studying the transapennine road system because the same location features another two parallel road routes built in subsequent eras. Just 8 metres below the Roman road,



Mount Bastione (site A/5-north): *detail of the paved ridge path.*



Mount Bastione (site A/6-north): *the point where the roughly paved uphill path takes a 90° turn to the left.*

over the centuries, the unpaved medieval transapennine mule track has sunk so much that it now forms a 2/3 metre deep ditch. Here, the mule track runs more or less parallel to the Roman road. A little further south, the track and the road unite and follow the same route along the narrow watershed that descends towards Faggeta.

A fourth road runs along the same versant, 15/16 metres below and parallel to the mule track. This is a local dirt road with a gravel bed, built in 1948-50 to provide access to the house in "Faggeta", at the time inhabited by farmers.

Thus, within the space of 35-40 metres, on the same west facing versant, just below the peak of mount Bastione, there is evidence of four parallel road routes used during different epochs:

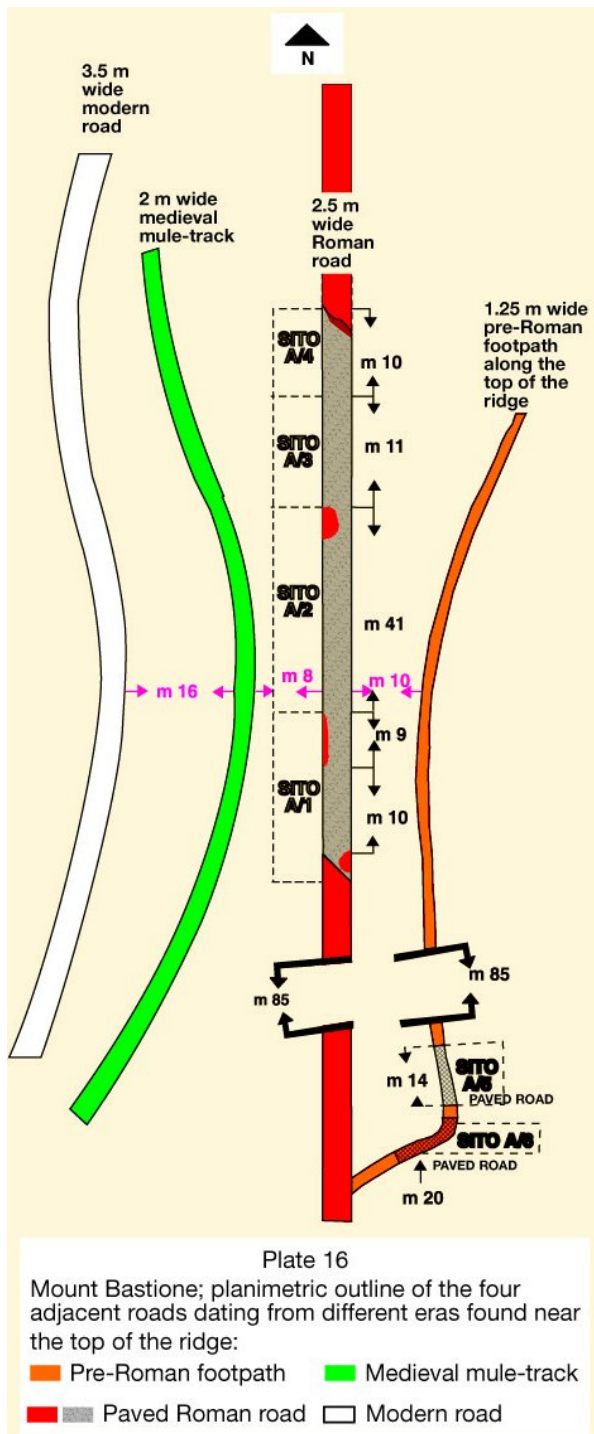
- the oldest, presumably pre-Roman, exactly retraces the top of the ridge;



- subsequently the Romans built a perfectly paved, 2.40 to 2.50 metre wide road, about 10 metres below the top of the ridge;
- in the Middle Ages, the same ridge was used to cross the Apennines, but the route of the mule track is 8 to 10 metres below the Roman road;
- finally, in modern times a local dirt road was created 15 metres below the medieval mule track.

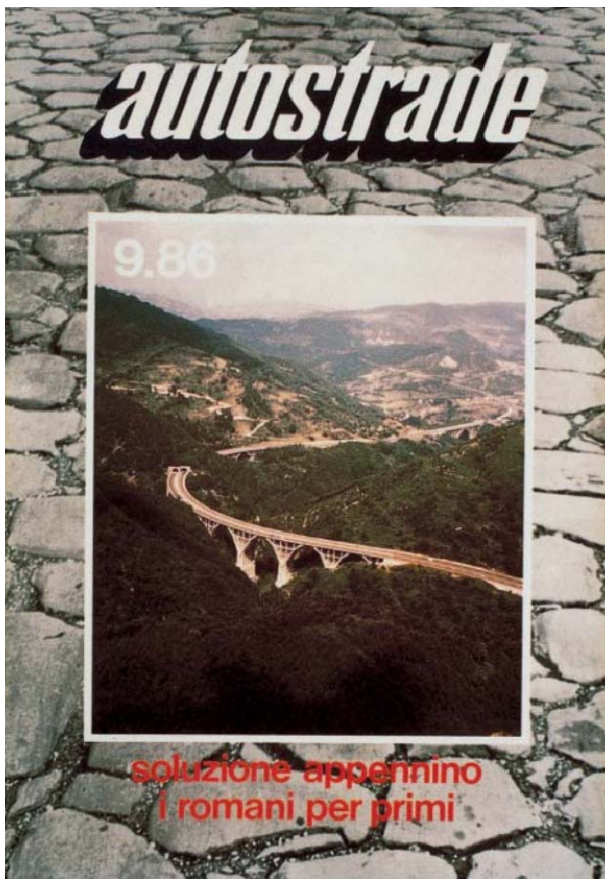


Mount Bastione: the medieval mule track covered in leaves. The track has sunk into the west versant of the ridge and is almost parallel to the Roman road, 8-10 metres above.



Therefore, man has always used the same ridge to cross the Apennines, but during each age, the route has progressively been tens of metres lower. When comparing the position of these ancient routes with the more recent road system, it is possible to note that much lower down, on the same western versant, the inter-regional road off the 325 Trunk Road in Rioveggio, passes through Montefredente, Pian del Voglio and Bruscoli, to reach the Futa pass.

Even further down is the *Autostrada del Sole* [the A1 motorway] that links Bologna to Florence. Finally, a year ago, construction of a motorway tunnel nearly 9 km long was started almost on the bed of the river Setta, on the western slope of this ridge. The tunnel will go towards improving the transapennine road system between Bologna and Florence, in a bid to get rid of the difficulties that crossing the Emilian-Tuscan mountain range still involves today in spite of the motorway, over 2,500 years since the Etruscans retraced an existing and very ancient track, choosing the exact summit of this ridge to cross the Apennines. We should not be surprised that even today, at the start of the third millennium, the same route is still used to improve the link between Bologna and Florence, the only diversity lies in the altitude of the road. The Etruscans travelled at 1,130 metres above sea level. Today the tunnel is being constructed on the lowest part of the same ridge, at 420 metres above sea level.



*The cover of the monthly magazine "AUTOSTRADE" with the title: "The Apennine Solution: the Romans were the first". The magazine published an article about our first finds in its September 1986 issue.*

#### 4 - La Faggeta.

We cannot continue the description of our exploration towards the Futa pass without mentioning "La Faggeta", located just south of mount Bastione.

The name Faggeta indicates a now decayed rural building, located exactly on the top of the ridge. From here, the ridge descends to an altitude of 1,097 metres above sea level, about 500 metres south of mount Bastione.

Constructed in ancient times and rebuilt during subsequent epochs, as testified by the various architectural elements incorporated in its walls, the building stands near a compulsory point of passage where ridge narrows, leaving no other alternative.

Perhaps the building was built on this location because of this orographic feature, strategically important in terms of controlling transapennine travel from the Upper Middle Ages<sup>6</sup> onwards. Its importance is also confirmed by the discovery of two aqueducts (one deeper than the other) built in different epochs. Both aqueducts are supplied by the same source that flows from the upper slopes of mount Bastione and supplies water to the building. The upper aqueduct is well manufactured with coupled terracotta pipes dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The aqueduct below follows the same route. It is made of rectangular sandstone slabs arranged to form a rudimentary conduit, which can be attributed to a much earlier period.

The presence of the two aqueducts proves that in ancient times, this building was built for military purposes for two different reasons:

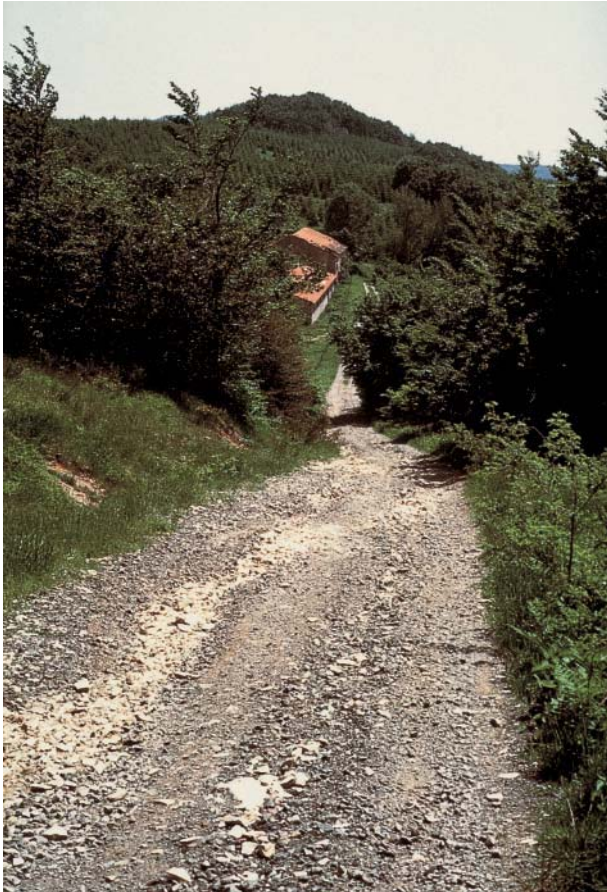
- no farm house in the entire upper Apennine area nor any home in the towns further downhill was supplied by an aqueduct before 1900. Only castles or the homes of aristocrats could afford this type of luxury;
- no farmhouse has ever been built on the top of a ridge at an altitude of over 1,000 metres. This would have meant the trouble of transporting uphill the construction materials first and all the farm and woodland products second (hay, cereals, wood, etc.); it would have been much more logical to build the house further downhill below the farmland to make carrying these items easier.

We are convinced that in the case of the building on La Faggeta, it must have started to be used as a farmhouse long after it was originally built; it was simply an opportunity to exploit an existing solid building.

The name of this solitary house was used in the Middle Ages to indicate the mule track that went from Tuscany to Bologna through the Stale pass (Futa pass). This is also confirmed by Leonardo Rombai, Professor of the Geographic Institution of the University of

<sup>6</sup> The importance of this building was also testified by the coat of arms of the Medici family from Florence, installed over the entrance and unfortunately stolen about 20 years ago.





*The gravel road built in the 1950s to link La Faggeta (just visible among the trees) to Pian di Balestra. Here the road coincides exactly with the ridge, and is thus superimposed on the Roman and medieval routes.*

Florence<sup>7</sup>: “there were a dozen commonly used transapennine routes in the sixteenth century: (omissis) the “Faggeta” or “Cannove” route that ran along the left versant of the Savena valley. It then left the Bolognese Giogo towards Pianoro. It passed through Brento, Trasasso, Cedrecchia, Madonna dei Fornelli, the Monte Bastione pass, La Faggeta and the Passeggere pass where it descended towards the Stale pass and continued along the “mule track” to Barberino”.

Therefore, La Faggeta was on the transapennine axis used in the Middle Ages and, probably, because its name was handed down

with strict reference to the road, it was also a stopover and refreshment point for travellers, as was the Stale, eight kilometres further south on the same route, near the Futa pass.



*La Faggeta: water conduit made of sandstone slabs found one metre below the terracotta aqueduct. Considering its position and construction technique, it is probably much older than the terracotta aqueduct.*



*La Faggeta: aqueduct made of coupled terracotta pipes which supplied water from mount Bastione to the building called La Faggeta found at a depth of 50 cm and which probably dates back to 1300-1400.*

<sup>7</sup> Leonardo Rombai: preface to “Libro vecchio di strade della Repubblica Fiorentina” edited by Gabriele Ciampi. Published by Papafava, 1987, page 18. This information comes from a map by father Giovanni Inghirami (1779-1851) purchased years ago by the Moreniana Library in Florence.

<sup>8</sup> E. Repetti: work cited, volume III, Florence 1839, page 702: “STALE [from “Ospitale” meaning Hospice] in the Futa Apennines in the Val di Sieve – An ancient hospice that stood on the old main road to Bologna called “dello Stale” (omissis).